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RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0074
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 1708
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 0673
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BAGHDAD FOR DMCCULLOUGH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/24/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [CASC](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: CALM RETURNING TO BAUCHI AFTER WEEKEND RIOTS

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter Pflaumer for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Calm appears to be returning to Bauchi after sectarian violence on both February 21 and 23, which was apparently touched off by a parking dispute. Press reports indicate 11 people killed, houses of worship destroyed, and shops and homes sacked and burned. The army and police are on the scene and appear to have largely restored order. Coming fast on the heels of November's riots in Jos that left hundreds dead, and given Bauchi's proximity to Jos, things could have been much worse. Nonetheless, this latest event illustrates an apparently rising temperature of ethnic and religious tension across northern Nigeria, an extremely worrying trend. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On February 21, sectarian violence broke out in Bauchi -- a northern state with a Muslim Hausa-Fulani majority, but also significant populations of smaller Christian groups. Bauchi town is also only about 80 miles from Jos, where a disputed election in November sparked sectarian clashes in which hundreds died. In this case, the conflict was sparked by a seemingly trivial dispute over parking. According to press reports, two different Muslim factions arrived to worship at a mosque in a small suburb of Bauchi town at the same time, in violation of an agreement worked out beforehand to give each group its own time for services. The greater-than-usual numbers of people overflowed the mosque's parking area, resulting in some worshippers demanding parking space at a church 50 meters down the road. Upon being refused permission to do so, press reports say that members of the aggrieved faction burned the church down. A short time later unidentified persons also destroyed the mosque, and events quickly got out of hand. 11 people are reported to have been killed, anywhere from 6-13 churches and one mosque reportedly burned down, and, in subsequent, localized outbursts of violence, shops and homes looted and destroyed.

¶3. (SBU) The Arewa Consultative Forum -- a northern Muslim association -- and the Christian Association of Nigeria both quickly appealed to their members for calm; but, with feelings still raw after November's sectarian riots in Jos, Nigerian authorities have tried to move briskly to restore order. The Federal Government has sent in troops to patrol

troubled neighborhoods, but some reports indicate that as late as Monday, February 23, some looters had successfully avoided concentrations of police and soldiers and targeted commercial districts owned by Igbo traders, looting and burning homes and shops. A dusk-to-dawn curfew has been imposed, which has now been extended to 5pm to dawn. Post has no reports of American citizens being targeted or injured, and of the two registered citizens who gave a Bauchi home address, the health and welfare of both has been confirmed.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: That something as innocuous as a parking dispute could so quickly turn into a bloodbath shows how close to the surface intercommunal tensions boil in the region. Most observers consider the Bauchi state government's, and GON's, responses to these events to have been more decisive and effective than those seen in Jos in November. That said, state Governor Malam Isa Yuguda's decision to take time during the height of the crisis to attend a traditional ruler's funeral in another state, rather than staying at the helm, has been criticized in some quarters. Overall, it is clear that ethnic and religious tensions in northern Nigeria -- and those who would seek to exploit them -- have received fresh strength. The GON must redouble its efforts at maintaining peace and security if it is to stop this worrying spike in death and mayhem. END COMMENT.

¶5. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.
SANDERS